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Pan-Europe.

THE EVANGELIZATION OF FRANCE.



L. T. CHAMBERLAIN.





Gift of the Society

THE EVANGELIZATION OF FRANCE.

*earlier
revised*

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I am sincerely grateful, Mrs. President, for the kind words in which you have introduced me to this audience of your own friends, and friends of the noble women associated with you, and friends also, I trust I may add, of French evangelization. To the full, I share your regret at the unavoidable absence of Rev. Dr. Hitchcock, one who has an exceptionally thorough knowledge of France, and whose interest in her spiritual welfare, none can doubt. I had hoped that he would tell us of those "White Fields" which he had so recently re-visited, and show us the self-denying mission-workers, their varied and faithful missionary operations, the opportunities numberless which call for instant response, and the glorious promise of labour's abundant reward. Had he so spoken, it would have become evident to us, I am sure, that we had no reason to be hopeless of the evangelization of that wonderful land. Doubtless we should have been convinced, as we listened, that there was, for us, no more reason of discouragement, than for one who might be standing in a quarry-

yard,—around him half-wrought blocks, unfinished columns, not even the top-stone carved,—yet in the very gathering of elements, in the very mass of materials, a sure prophecy of the building that should some day rise in beauty and in strength.

If I read the signs aright, we are approaching a crisis in the destiny of the world. It cannot be meaningless, in a spiritual sense, that now the barriers of space and time are so largely removed; that earth, and air, and sea, and sky, are yielding up their secrets; that energies elemental, limitless, are proffering us their power; and that, along with this understanding of nature and this use of her treasured might, the mind of man is still asking questions about things which are deeper than science and higher than art. The stimulus, the movement, the acceleration, the momentum,—all this is bound to be influential in results, as surely as harvests spring from seed, or waves arise at summons of the wind. These are times for forces which have primal place and pristine glory; forces which can bear the strain, and guide the urgency, and assume the throne!

To-day, therefore, we are to cheer ourselves anew with the assurance that there is but one

source of such regnant powers, and that that single source is the Gospel of our Lord. There is but one Sun of Righteousness; and, believe it, around that central attraction all orbits will sooner or later swing, and from that matchless radiance all stars will draw their light.

Look back, for a moment, at the history which has already been written. Time was when such civilization as the world boasted, was chiefly alien to that Israel from which came, at last, the “Desire of all The Nations.” On pagan foundations culture was mainly built, and by pagan ideals culture was mainly inspired. But, contrariwise, it has already come to pass that the world’s best thought, the world’s best culture, is indebted to, is centered in, Christianity’s teaching and spirit. Nor, in saying this, do I forget that Christianity, in definite form, has never prevailed among even the half of the human race. I do not forget that beyond our Western Christendom, stretches a vast Orient, with beliefs and institutions in no wise Christian. I do not overlook the fact that the Dark Continent is still almost unpenetrated by the Gospel’s light. I do not ignore the fact that within Christendom itself, there are multitudes

who not only reject Christianity, but openly oppose it. True is it, nevertheless, that the Christ we love and the Christianity we advocate, are now the life and the light of the world's best culture.

In truth, how fares it with that immemorial East? Are not the systems which there prevail, chiefly the result of past ages? Have they present power? What contribution is the non-Christian East now making to the constructive, controlling ideas of our age? Now and then some student is attracted by the refinements of Oriental metaphysics; and here and there, in Persian, or Assyrian, or Indian, or Chinese morals, we may find the suggestion, the analogy, of a Christian precept. But as for mental, spiritual force, such as either rules, or is apparently destined to rule, the modern world, the East is as barren as the drifting sand or the wind-swept pavement. The star that now guides even the intelligence of the nations is in the West. Where Christianity is, there is the seat of intellectual dominion.

But let us consider history's verdict in another light. Confessedly, there still are wrongs innumerable,—sheer violations of both equity and good-will. The rights of man are still widely

disregarded. The sufferings of man are often scorned. In many an instance, strength crushes weakness, knowledge overreaches ignorance, wealth despises poverty, classes high in the social scale seem bent on broadening the gulf between themselves and those beneath. You look upon the existing conditions, in even so-called Christian lands, and it doubtless sometimes seems to you that moral evil, social injustice, political oppression, are acquiring a constantly increasing strength. There is enough of mutual hatred, and more than enough of mutual greed, to make the whole head sick and the whole heart faint. The cloud, the gloom, the darkness, shuts you in, until you almost question whether even Christendom has greatly bettered the ancient times. The individual dishonored, the family assailed, the State corrupted, the Church herself put to shame in the very house of her friends!

But look at events in their larger scope. Whence has come the light in which those foul facts are seen to be so foul, and those iniquities recognized as so unjust? What is it which, in soberest contrast, has already made conditions in Christian lands, dark as those conditions still are, show

white against the blackness of the ancient world? What is it which, after all, everywhere tends to uplift, and is everywhere actually uplifting, modern life, as the moon's attraction lifts up the tides? To those inquiries there is, there can be, but one reply. It is Christianity, with its Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of man! The divine compassion towards weakness, and pitifulness towards suffering, and self-sacrificing mercy for the victims of sin, together with that justice which is over and under all,—that, on the one hand! On the other hand, the divine conception of man as made in God's image; bearing, even in his degradation, something of the celestial likeness; entitled, under all conditions, to reverent regard; capable always of restoration to his birthright heritage; clothed evermore with the glory of One who stood in his stead, and was lifted up for his exaltation! Those are the Christian forces,—forces which have set themselves against every woe, every wrong; forces which are destined, some day, to bring in a world-wide good-will.

Accordingly, with such conception of the times in which we live, and with such well-grounded confidence as touching the ways and will of God,

let us now turn to that France, for whose evangelization we work and hope. See, I pray you, in that same loved land, those tokens which show that there also there is stir, and movement, and progress. Nor can I forbear including in this swift summary, the political interests of France. It seems scarce possible that less than thirty years ago, hard after the news of Sedan's disaster and the Emperor's surrender, the National Assembly declared the overthrow of the Empire and proclaimed the Government of the National Defence. Who could have foreseen that the Republic which was framed in such delirium of excitement, with such lack of fitting preparation,—the problems to be faced enough to daunt the bravest,—who could have foreseen that the Republic thus launched, was to outride the stormy sea, and come even to the century's close, with the tricolor still floating proudly from both foremast and mainmast? There have been crises within that period, and disorders, and threatened revolutions; but I take it that the French Republic is, at present, stronger in the real love and reverence of the people than it has ever been before. Think of a country which, within a hundred years, has been twice wasted by

civil war, three times invaded, six times rent by reckless revolution, yet a country which is to-day among the foremost of Christendom's nations!

Bear in mind, also, the progress which modern France has made in educational directions. Once, the utmost darkness of even the Dark Ages settling like a pall over France,—a gloom that might be felt, like that of Egypt! After that, centuries of an illiteracy which Roman Catholicism fostered rather than dispelled. But to-day, a system of French common schools which veriest demagogues are constrained to applaud, and political parties to praise, and which even clericalism hardly dares to oppose! Who can estimate the possibilities of good which lie enfolded in such a giving of schools, of education, to the common people of France, to the *bourgeoisie*?

Recall, too, the marvelous advance in point of at least, religiousness, since the days of the great Revolution, or even since the days of the Franco-Prussian war. An old-time denial of life beyond the grave; a later scoffing at the very idea of God; yet within our memory, and in contrast with all that, Gambetta declaring that France must have a religion free and real; Victor Hugo wishing that

a copy of the Bible might be placed in every home in France; the great Jules Favre dying in the Protestant faith, and buried from the humble meeting-house where he was wont to worship; and all competent observers agreeing that France is now weary of negations, and dissatisfied with materialistic teachings.

Consider, again, the modified relation which France now sustains to the authority of Rome. Time was when the "bright, consummate flower" of devotion to Roman Catholicism, was the France that dyed her very garments in the blood of Protestants, and registered her vow that the Papal religion should remain forever as the faith of the land. But now, with the Jesuits under ban; an Archbishop fined, in court, for disobedience to the orders of the Minister of Public Worship; Protestants admitted to high Government positions; the lamented President Carnot publicly affirming his affectionate regard for French Protestants; city and town and village alike, open to the preaching of the Gospel; and the sentiment of religious liberty in the very air; the authority of Rome is broken, where once it reigned supreme. I see not how the old days of Papal intolerance can ever

return to *La Belle France*. Even though the Republic should be overthrown, the principles of civil and spiritual freedom, now so familiar to the French people, would remain in living force.

Or, once more, look directly at Protestantism itself, in France. The record is well known. Three centuries ago, a third of the French people Protestant; then the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day; the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes; the dragonnades; the ever-recurring horrors of proscription and exile! Even so late as the early part of this present century, the earnestly devoted Protestant pastors in France, were only a few score. Protestant forms of worship were disesteemed. Protestant church-buildings were suffered to fall into decay. The spirit of earnest, hopeful evangelization was virtually unknown. Now, the faithful, consecrated, self-sacrificing, French Protestant pastors are numbered by the hundred. Their congregations are worshipfully devout. Their church-buildings are cared for with reverent regard. And though the material resources of French Protestants are comparatively meagre, I question whether any churches, in any land, are doing more for the

spread of the Gospel, in proportion to the means possessed!

What now, I ask, if in such soil, where the elements of holy power are certainly present; where the opportunities of further advance are countless; where the thirty and sixty and hundred-fold of reward await our effort,—what, if in such soil we sow the abundant seed?

And yet, it may be that that suggestion wakens more than one mind here to the wonder why, in even such a beneficent crisis, it should be needful to ask the aid of American friends. Listen, then, for one further moment. Have all of you reflected that the total enumeration of Protestantism in France, includes not more than seven hundred thousand souls? That though you reckon those whose allegiance is merely nominal, you still come short of one in fifty? Have you realized what it means, that there is but a single devoted Protestant pastor to each forty thousand of the inhabitants? Have you set in its true relation to such facts, that further fact already noted, that the Protestants of France are, for the most part, poor? Yet put that situation over against the situation in this land of ours! Here, the numerical preponder-

ance, the social dominance, overwhelmingly on the side of the Protestant faith! Here, one in eight of the entire population, a member of an evangelical church "in good and regular standing!" Here, an ordained evangelical minister to every seven hundred of the people! Here, the greater part of our vast and ever-increasing wealth, in the hands of Protestant possessors! In the unmistakable sharpness of that contrast, is it possible not to perceive that we are in duty bound to give our aid?

Suppose, for the moment, that French Protestants made no appeal. Suppose that they stretched out no hand, and that they spoke to us not one entreating word. It still would be ours to proffer help. By the love we bear the one great King and His one great kingdom; by our inheritance in the fellowship of the saints; by our standing in the brotherhood of man; we are called to send to France our bestowals, and for her to lift on high our prayers. Doomed are we, in our own spiritual health, in our own spiritual life, if we deny the impulse which prompts us to send abroad our generous, gladsome gifts.

Sometimes there comes to me the vision of what

it would mean to us, to the world, to have France Protestant, to have France evangelical! I do not know, good friends, what you may customarily think with regard to the capabilities of the French nature and the French character. I know that in many minds there is the notion that the French are too mercurial, too volatile, to take an impress which is grand and enduring. I have heard it affirmed that what a Frenchman proclaims with passionate ardor to-day, he will be ready to denounce, with equally passionate ardor, to-morrow. But history has recorded no such verdict respecting French fidelity to our most holy faith! So far from that, history witnesses the fact that no soil of Christendom is richer in the blood of Protestant martyrs, than the soil of France. Is it token of inability to be steadfast, that those who put to death French women and children, for their love to Christ, felt compelled first to order their tongues torn out, lest their dying words should make new converts for their faith? Do you remember the reply of the old Huguenot, when the wrathful monarch said, "I will smite your faith as with the blows of vengeance!" "Sire," was the calm response, "it is an anvil which hath worn out many

a hammer." And the French are impetuous? Yes, I thank God that along with the steadfastness whose emblem is the rock, they have the vehemence whose sign is the whirlwind or the fire! What a Frenchman believes, he wishes all others to believe. He has a genius for advocacy and persuasion. His is the temperament which seeks the fore-front of battle, and sets at naught all adverse odds. France is to-day the source of immeasurable influence. On fields of battle, it is possible, of course, for incompetent leadership to shame her with defeat; but in the realms of philosophy, of science, of literature, of art, of manners, of morals, her dominance still is felt. For good or evil, she affects all civilized lands.

Put, accordingly, her intellect, her emotion, her flaming zeal, on the side of Christian truth; let the depths of her impassioned nature be stirred by a power divine; let her persuasiveness be enkindled for the Cross of Christ; and you will have a missionary force which will put to blush our more timid advance. Make France Biblically Christian, and you will have done much toward evangelizing the world.

And you will permit me, in closing, one word

with reference to the French Societies, through which we work. I can testify that those Societies are venerable with their years of service. They are illustrious with their devotion to their work. They are sagacious in their present unity of action and of plan. They understand the needs of their loved France. Their more than two hundred mission stations, with more than four hundred branches, bear witness to their zeal. They deserve our aid. To the pastors and churches of America they have abundant right to make appeal. I would that our missionary boards could devise some way in which to give them help. I wish that conferences, and presbyteries, and synods, might take effective action in their behalf. It is pitiful that the moderate sum which they require, cannot be readily gathered. For, I again assure you, there are few mission-fields in which the rewarding results would be so abundant as in France. It is for us, accordingly, to do what in us lies.

Do you recall the words with which Mr. Ruskin closes the first volume of the "Stones of Venice?" He says: "During the last thirty-five years, the best taught of our English people, the richest in

time and money, having more leisure, knowledge and power, than any other portion of the nation, have visited the continent, at the rate of many thousands a year. These, we might suppose, beholding, as they traveled, the condition of the States in which the Papal religion is professed, and being, at the same time, the most enlightened section of a great Protestant nation, would have been animated with some desire to dissipate the Romanist errors, and to communicate to others the better knowledge which they themselves possessed. I doubt not but that the Prince of Peace has watched each one of these travelers, and kept count for him of his travelling expenses, and of their distribution, in a manner of which neither the traveler nor his courier was at all informed. I doubt not, moreover, that such accounts have literally been kept for all of us, and that a day will come when they will be made clearly legible to us, and when we shall see on one side of the page, a great sum, accounted for in this manner:—To wooden-spoons, nut-crackers, and jewelry, bought at Geneva, and elsewhere among the Alps, so much; to shell cameos and bits of mosaic, bought at Rome, so much; to coral horns and lava

brooches, bought at Naples, so much; to glass beads at Venice, and gold filigree at Genoa, so much; to pictures, and statues, and ornaments, everywhere, so much; to entertainments, and good places for seeing sights, so much; to ball dresses, and general vanities, so much.

This, I say, will be the sum on one side of the page, and on the other will be written, To the struggling Protestant churches of France, Switzerland, and Piedmont, so much."

He adds,—and the suggestion is for us while at home no less than when abroad,—“Had we not better do this piece of statistics, for ourselves, in time?”

My friends, the hand of God is surely with us. For Him, nothing is too great. Listen! On the eighteenth of October, sixteen hundred and eighty-five, in the royal palace of Versailles, Louis XIV., at the instigation of Madame de Maintenon, signed the fatal Revocation. In that palace, Bousset had flattered despotism and eulogized persecution. Yet in that same palace, on the second of November, eighteen hundred and seventy-nine, in a room not far from the chamber where the “Grand Monarch” breathed his last, the

descendants of Huguenots, by permission of the Authorities, held Protestant worship, and preached the Gospel of Christ. There the "Church of the Desert" found romantic sanctuary, and chanted the old triumphal psalms!

Let us bate not one jot of heart or hope. Left to myself, I should long ago have despaired. But whoso lifts his eyes to the eternal hills, finds his faith renewed. I know that the truth which, of old, won its triumphant way in Ephesus, and Athens, and Corinth, and Rome, will some day make even Paris its friend and ally. I know that that Gospel of Christ which, in the beginning, armed Paganism assailed and Judaism condemned, which despotism flouted and heathen philosophy despised, yet which vanquished every foe,—I know that that Gospel will, sooner or later, claim France as its own. He who was lifted up, is even now drawing all men unto Himself. The dawn advances! Let us give and work and pray!

